Amendments to the Specification

Please replace paragraph **[0004]** with the following rewritten paragraph:

[0004] However, the SOx catalyst used in the aforementioned related-art exhaust emission control apparatus is not capable of infinitely taking up and retaining SOx from incoming exhaust gas, but has a limit to the amount of SOx retainable. Generally, as the amount of SOx retained by the SOx catalyst increases, it becomes more difficult for the SOx catalyst to ~~chapture~~capture and retain SOx contained in incoming exhaust gas; therefore, there is a tendency toward an increased amount of SOx contained in exhaust gas flowing out of the SOx retainer agent. Such an increase in the amount of SOx contained in exhaust gas flowing out of the SOx retainer agent will result in the sulfur poisoning of the NOx retainer agent in the aforementioned related-art exhaust emission control apparatus. Hence, the amount of SOx contained in exhaust gas flowing out of the SOx retainer agent needs to be small even if the amount of SOx retained in the SOx retainer agent becomes great.

Please replace paragraph **[0007]** with the following rewritten paragraph:

[0007] According to another aspect of the invention, an exhaust emission control method for an internal combustion engine is provided. The exhaust emission control method includes the steps of causing an exhaust gas to flow into an exhaust passage; causing a sulfur component retainer agent provided in the exhaust passage to ~~chapture~~capture and retain a sulfur component contained in an incoming exhaust gas; and causing a NOx retainer agent provided in the exhaust passage downstream of the sulfur component retainer agent to ~~chapture~~capture and retain NOx from an incoming exhaust gas if an air-fuel ratio of the incoming exhaust gas is lean of stoichiometry, and causing the NOx retainer agent to release NOx retained by the NOx retainer agent if the air-fuel ratio of the incoming exhaust gas is substantially stoichiometric or rich of stoichiometry. In the exhaust emission control method, if NOx retained by the NOx retainer agent is to be released, a NOx releasing process is

performed in which the air-fuel ratio of an exhaust gas flowing into the NOx retainer agent is adjusted so that the air-fuel ratio of the exhaust gas becomes substantially stoichiometric or rich of stoichiometry. If an amount of the sulfur component retained by the sulfur component retainer agent is at least a first predetermined amount, the air-fuel ratio of an exhaust gas flowing into the sulfur component retainer agent is prohibited from becoming substantially stoichiometric or rich of stoichiometry.

Please replace paragraph **[0024]** with the following rewritten paragraph:

[0024] The above-described NOx retainer agent 62 becomes unable to ~~chapture~~capture and retain any more NOx when the amount of NOx retained becomes great. That is, if the air-fuel ratio of exhaust gas flowing into the NOx retainer agent 62 is kept lean of stoichiometry, the NOx retaining capability of the NOx retainer agent 62 decreases so that the NOx retainer agent 62 cannot ~~chapture~~capture NOx. As a result, exhaust gas contains NOx even after passing through the NOx retainer agent 62. Therefore, in this invention, if the amount of NOx retained in the NOx retainer agent 62 exceeds a pre-set NOx saturation amount, a NOx releasing process (rich spike) is performed in which exhaust gas having a substantially stoichiometric or rich air-fuel ratio is supplied to the NOx retainer agent 62. Due to this releasing process, NOx retained by the NOx retainer agent 62 is released, and is reduced.

Please replace paragraph **[0028]** with the following rewritten paragraph:

[0028] However, in reality, the sulfur component retainer agent 61 is not always able to ~~chapture~~capture and retain substantially the entire amount of sulfur components contained in incoming exhaust gas. Furthermore, a certain amount of the sulfur components taken up by the sulfur component retainer agent 61 may be released in some cases. Therefore, the amount of sulfur components contained in the exhaust gas that flows out of the sulfur component retainer agent 61 (hereinafter, referred to as "the amount of outgoing sulfur

components") changes. The amount of outgoing sulfur components changes in accordance with various parameters regarding the sulfur component retainer agent 61. One of the parameters is the amount of sulfur components retained by the sulfur component retainer agent 61. For example, there is a tendency for the amount of outgoing sulfur components to increase as the amount of sulfur components retained by the sulfur component retainer agent 61 increases. This tendency is particularly remarkable if the air-fuel ratio of exhaust gas flowing into the sulfur component retainer agent 61 is substantially stoichiometric or rich of stoichiometry. That is, the amount of outgoing sulfur components corresponding to a great amount of sulfur components retained by the sulfur component retainer agent 61 is greater in the case where the air-fuel ratio of exhaust gas flowing into the sulfur component retainer agent 61 is substantially stoichiometric or rich of stoichiometry than in the case where the air-fuel ratio of the exhaust gas is lean of stoichiometry.

Please replace paragraph **[0029]** with the following rewritten paragraph:

[0029] When the above-described NOx releasing process has been performed, the air-fuel ratio of exhaust gas flowing into the sulfur component retainer agent 61 is substantially stoichiometric or rich of stoichiometry. Therefore, if at this time, the amount of sulfur components retained by the sulfur component retainer agent 61 is great, the sulfur component retainer agent 61 does not sufficiently ~~chapture~~capture and retain sulfur components from the incoming exhaust gas, or releases sulfur components retained in the agent 61. As a result, sulfur components enter the NOx retainer agent 62. Hence, the sulfur poisoning of the NOx retainer agent 62 progresses, and the NOx retaining capability of the NOx retainer agent 62 decreases.

Please replace paragraph **[0037]** with the following rewritten paragraph:

[0037] As described above, the sulfur component retainer agent 61 is able to ~~chapture~~capture and retain sulfur components from incoming exhaust gas, and is able to

release sulfur components if the condition for releasing sulfur components is met. At the time of release of sulfur components from the sulfur component retainer agent 61, the passage of exhaust gas through the NOx retainer agent 62 is avoided, so that the inflow of sulfur components into the NOx retainer agent 62 is prevented. The use of the sulfur component retainer agent 61 removes sulfur components contained in exhaust gas discharged from the engine, at a site upstream of the NOx retainer agent 62.

Please replace paragraph **[0063]** with the following rewritten paragraph:

[0063] In the foregoing embodiments, if the amount of sulfur components retained by the sulfur component retainer agent 61 is greater than or equal to a predetermined amount and it is not possible to release fuel components from the sulfur component retainer agent 61, the air-fuel ratio of exhaust gas flowing into the sulfur component retainer agent 61 is prohibited from becoming substantially stoichiometric or rich of stoichiometry. However, if this state continues for a long time, the NOx retainer agent 62 becomes unable to ~~chapture~~capture and retain NOx from incoming exhaust gas, and therefore exhaust gas contains NOx even after passing through the NOx retainer agent 62. As a result, exhaust gas containing NOx is emitted into the atmosphere.

Please replace paragraph **[0078]** with the following rewritten paragraph:

[0078] The NOx retainer agent 62 in the foregoing embodiments may be supported on a particulate filter that is able to trap particulate matter from incoming exhaust gas. The particulate filter may be equipped with an active oxygen generating agent so as to continuously oxidize and remove the particulate matter trapped by the filter by a mechanism described below. The active oxygen generating agent, similar to the NOx retainer agent 62 in the foregoing embodiments, is able to ~~chapture~~capture and retain sulfur components from incoming exhaust gas and release the sulfur components. As the active oxygen generating agent retains sulfur components, the particulate removing function of the agent degrades.